

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, May 3, 2007

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<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-9
Foster Care	10-12
Health Care	13-18
Child Care	19-23
Child Support	24
Housing	25-27
Vulnerable Adults	28
MCSC	29-30
*State Budget	31-41

*Important story at this spot

[<<Back](#)

No second trial for bleach in baby bottle mom

Updated: May 2, 2007 09:20 PM EDT

HASTINGS -- A Barry County woman accused of putting bleach in her baby's bottle will not face a second jury trial.

Jennifer Clement's first trial ended in a hung jury on April 17. The Barry County Prosecutor's office has decided not to pursue a second jury trial.

The trial's dismissal came without prejudice, allowing the Prosecutor to recharge Clement if any additional evidence is obtained.

The Barry County Prosecutor successfully tried Clement in November 2006 on a petition of child abuse and neglect in the Family Division of the Circuit Court. The Court found the allegations, including the bleach incident, to be true and terminated Clement's parental rights permanently.

She was also convicted of using Marijuana in March 2007 and is currently on bond for Larceny by False Pretenses.

In the April trial, the jury was split on the bleach incident and could not come to a unanimous verdict. Knowing that Clement's parental rights have been terminated and that she is facing other charges, the Barry County Prosecutor has decided to move to dismiss the child abuse case.

Previous Stories on Woodtv.com:

[Mistrial in 'bleach baby bottle' case](#)

['Bleach in baby bottle' mom on trial](#)



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Father charged in death of 1-year-old son left in hot car

May 2, 2007

By BILL POOVEY

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. -- A 1-year-old boy died after being left alone in a car for hours as temperatures soared into the 80s, and his father was charged with negligent homicide, police said.

Timothy Reid was found unresponsive by his father, Robert Reid, Tuesday afternoon, nearly seven hours after Reid had parked the car and went to work, officials said. Emergency workers pronounced the toddler dead at the scene and said the temperature in the car was 142 degrees.

Reid, 43, was charged with criminally negligent homicide and aggravated child abuse and neglect, Lt. Tim Carroll said Wednesday.

"The punishment is done regardless of what happens in court," Carroll said. "He is torn up. He reacted the way a parent should react who has lost a child."

Police said Reid took his three other children, ages 6, 10 and 12, to school Tuesday morning and had intended to take Timothy to day care before driving to work.

Investigators said Reid instead went to work and left the boy in the car seat.

Arrest records show the car was equipped with an interior motion detector that tripped the alarm several times on Tuesday. The father eventually turned off the alarm remotely from inside the office when he could not see anyone around the vehicle.

The boy was discovered when Reid went to his car to go pick up the children that afternoon.

The boy's mother had driven to the company she owns with her husband in a different vehicle. She was trying to resuscitate the child when emergency workers got there.

The outside temperature Tuesday reached 89 degrees, according to the National Weather Service.

Reid was released on \$15,000 bail pending a May 23 court hearing; records show he did not yet have a lawyer. A woman who answered the phone at Unishippers, the business owned by the boy's parents, said no one would comment Wednesday.

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Ohio Police Say Kids Caged By Parents

POSTED: 11:01 am EDT May 3, 2007

UPDATED: 11:05 am EDT May 3, 2007

TOLEDO, Ohio -- Two brothers were locked up in a dog cage when their father used drugs and when they were being punished, and one had to wear a shock collar, authorities said.

The parents appeared briefly in court Thursday on charges of child endangerment and making or selling drugs in front of the children, ages 10 and 5.

Jessica Botzko, 28, and John Westover, 37, were arrested a day earlier, after the boys ran away from home and were found on a neighbor's porch.

The boys told officers that they had been abused and locked in a dog cage at their home, said police Capt. Ray Carroll. They also said their father put them in the cage when he was using drugs, according to Carroll.

Court documents say the 10-year-old boy was repeatedly shocked at the family's home through a remote-controlled collar meant as a training device for animals.

Police searched the family's mobile home and found it filled with garbage, Carroll said.

The couple's hearings were continued because neither had a lawyer and the parents remained in jail.

Another Ohio couple, Michael and Sharen Gravelle of Norwalk, were convicted in February of child abuse and endangerment for keeping some of their 11 special-needs adopted children in wire and wood enclosures.

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Court Docket: Appeals court hears arguments in rape case

Press & Argus

May 3, 2007

The Michigan Court of Appeals heard arguments Wednesday to determine whether a Livingston County assistant prosecutor should be disqualified from trying a father-son rape case.

The Livingston County prosecutor's office appealed Circuit Judge David Reader's disqualification of Assistant Prosecutor Daniel Rose from trying the case of a Tyrone Township man accused of molesting his then-12-year-old son.

Reader disqualified Rose, at the defense's request, from trying the case because he interviewed the accuser, which the defense said meant Rose could be called as a witness at trial.

The now-13-year-old boy alleges his father, Daniel Sanford Tesen, 35, raped him in April 2006. The teen's statements were obtained by Rose in an interview at LACASA, a process that is witnessed by a team of several people that evaluates child victims.

Tesen is charged with one count each of distributing obscene matter to a child, third-degree child abuse and truancy for failing to send his son to school. He also faces 14 counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, which are punishable by up to life in prison. His trial has been put on hold pending the appeals.

[Return to regular web page](#)



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May 3, 2007

Internet child sex abuser is sentenced

Mark Hicks / The Detroit News

ANN ARBOR -- A Detroit man was sentenced Wednesday in Washtenaw County Circuit Court to up to 15 years in prison on child pornography charges involving an alleged Internet sex abuse victim.

Judge Archie Brown sentenced Kenneth R. Gourlay, 29, to five to 15 years on one count of third-degree criminal sexual conduct as well as four to 10 years for distributing child pornography.

In March he was convicted on one misdemeanor and nine felony counts -- including two for enticing a child to engage in sexually abusive activity -- stemming from contact with Justin Berry, the teenage subject of a New York Times investigation who last May testified before Congress that Gourlay molested him at his home in 2000.

"Real justice was delivered today," said Matt Frendewey, a spokesman for Attorney General Michael Cox.

On Monday, a trial for Gourlay will begin in Wayne County Circuit Court on criminal sexual conduct charges for allegedly molesting another minor in the area.

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[Return to regular web page](#)



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Gourlay sentenced to 6 to 20 years

Convicted pedophile did not try to explain his actions

Thursday, May 03, 2007

BY ART AISNER

News Staff Reporter

Ken Gourlay admits he made mistakes with a California teenager who became the national face of sexually exploited youth over the Internet.

But even after congressional scrutiny, criminal investigations, and a difficult trial that called into question the ethics of one of the world's most respected newspapers, the Chelsea native said he never imagined it would land him in prison.

It did.

Gourlay, 29, was sentenced Wednesday in Washtenaw County Circuit Court to serve six to 20 years in prison for sexually assaulting and luring a minor into the underworld of Internet child pornography.

Standing in shackles and reading from a hand-written letter, the soft-spoken former computer programmer contritely told Washtenaw Chief Circuit Judge Archie Brown that he was raised by law-abiding parents and always respected authority. He said he also strove to live by a moral code that spurred him toward community service and ministry work as a teenager and young adult.

He couldn't, and didn't even try to explain his actions that prosecutors said had a devastating effect on at least three teenage boys and possibly others he used in order to make money and satisfy his own sexual appetite.

"I never thought I'd be involved in a criminal trial ... but I acknowledge I made mistakes in my relationship with Justin Berry and I know that I must pay the penalty," Gourlay said of his victim.

Berry gained national notice after he was the subject of a New York Times story and then testified last year before a congressional committee on the dangers of the Internet.

A jury convicted Gourlay of 10 felony charges that include enticing a child to engage in sexually abusive activity, using a computer to engage in child sexually abusive activity, distributing child pornography over the Internet, and third-degree criminal sexual conduct after a weeklong trial in March.

Trial testimony revealed he lured Berry, then 15, to Ann Arbor in 2002 for a computer camp and molested him. He then used his Ann Arbor-based company, Chain Communications Inc., to register Internet domain names and host Web sites that Berry used to sell videos in which he and other teens performed sex acts for money.

The sordid details surfaced after Berry told his story to a New York Times reporter in 2005. The story came under heavy scrutiny at Gourlay's trial after it was revealed that the reporter paid Berry \$2,000. The money was later repaid and Times officials issued a disclaimer, saying they were unaware of the payment.

Berry, now 20, lives in California and did not appear in court Wednesday. He sent a letter to Brown that referred to the emotional suffering he endured and ongoing counseling, Brown said. Brown said he also received 25 letters from Gourlay supporters, many of whom were in attendance Wednesday.

Gourlay's attorney, James Howarth, asked for leniency, saying Gourlay suffered from a psychological sickness.

"He makes no excuses," Howarth said. "If you suffer from pedophilia, you must not act and he knows that. But he's not the type of person we want to have the key thrown away when he's locked up."

Special Assistant State Attorney General Douglas Baker disagreed and urged Brown to deliver a harsh penalty that exceeded state sentencing guidelines. He mentioned the other two Michigan youths who testified at trial that they, like Berry, were manipulated and exploited by Gourlay, as well as excerpts from Gourlay's journal that depicted his internal struggle over his sexual attraction to young boys.

"This defendant poses a continued danger to the community. The pedophilia, that's not going to go away, we know from other cases it's a lifelong characteristic. He should be kept away from us as long as possible," Baker said.

Gourlay's mother, Katherine, said the family and supporters were prepared to see him sent to prison, but called the sentence severe.

Gourlay is scheduled to go to trial Monday in Wayne County on several counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Art Aisner can be reached at aaisner@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6823.

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Vanlerberg takes over as CAPA director

Jan Bellamy, Staff Writer
517.437.6014

Maxine Vanlerberg is the new executive director at CAPA — Child Abuse and Prevention Awareness. Vanlerberg said she saw the job advertisement as a calling.

“I remembered what I dealt with in my past, when my grandson was abused,” said Vanlerberg, “and I recalled I said at the time I would someday do something to have an impact on child abuse.”

Vanlerberg also serves as chair on the Hillsdale County Board of Commissioners. As a commissioner, she represents District 4 (Amboy, Camden, Woodbridge and Wright townships).

“Education and increased awareness are the main goals of the director’s position,” said Vanlerberg. “Programs are generally directed to students and designed for a variety of age levels.”

The CAPA position requires about 20 hours per week. As a nonprofit organization, CAPA’s mission is “to promote the prevention and awareness of child abuse and neglect, and to advocate for appropriate social change.”

Among CAPA’s highest profile programs are “Baby Think It Over” and “Real Men Rock.” The organization’s funding sources include individual memberships and donations, corporate gifts and sponsorships, and grants from the Children’s Trust Fund and Hillsdale County United Way.

Coming up June 9 is a major annual fundraising event: Magic Ride, a bicycle, inline skate and jogging tour that begins and ends at Sandy Beach on Baw Beese Lake. Last year, 71 participants raised more than \$8,000. A second annual event is the CAPA Talent Show, set for the Labor Day weekend. For additional information, call (517) 437-3100 or go to CAPA’s Web site: www.capahillsdale.org.

The office is in the MSU–Extension building, 20 Care Drive, Suite C, Hillsdale.

This story was last modified: Wednesday, May 2, 2007

Niles Daily Star

ONLINE EDITION

[Print Page](#)

Foster and adoptive parents fill huge need

Wednesday, May 2, 2007 11:51 AM EDT

Wednesday, May 2, 2007

In an ideal world, every child would have a mother and father that loved them and provided for their every need. Unfortunately, it isn't a perfect world.

In Michigan alone there are more than 4,000 children waiting for a family, or for their adoption to be finalized.

When parental rights are terminated, it is the loving and giving people who open their homes through foster care, who provide a place during transition.

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has declared May as Foster Care Month in Michigan to highlight the vital role that foster families play in caring for the state's 18,500 foster children.

Foster Care Month provides an opportunity to make Michigan residents more aware of the need for caring, dedicated foster parents and the needs of children in foster care. Children usually enter foster care because of neglect or abuse in their homes. Foster care families provide safe, stable and supportive homes for these children and youths until they can be returned to their parents or are adopted into permanent homes.

Finding enough homes to meet the needs here in Michigan for foster families is critical.

Though the goal is for children to remain, or be returned to their parents, safety concerns often mean separation is necessary. When children must be removed, those in the Department of Human Services (DHS) are interested in the child's welfare work toward keeping children with siblings and relatives and in their communities.

Babies are the easier to love, but older children and minorities are often the hardest to place.

Forty of these children are featured in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called the Michigan Heart Gallery. The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), seeks to bring our community closer to the faces and voices of children waiting for a "forever family."

This exhibit will be touring Michigan and free copies are available of a promotional DVD, featuring photographs from the exhibit, video of children who are waiting to be adopted and information about the adoption process for families who are ready to begin the process.

The photographs in The Heart Gallery were taken by more than 40 professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. The kids thoroughly enjoyed their photo shoot experience. Some children were able to help select which portrait to feature in The Heart Gallery, while others came up with their own poses and some were given lessons in photography during the photo shoot, allowing them to become budding photographers themselves.

For more information about the Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit The Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org



Foster parent meetings set

Thursday, May 03, 2007

Family Service & Children's Aid will host two meetings Wednesday for couples and individuals interested in foster parenting or adoption.

An informational meeting will take place at 5 p.m., followed by an orientation meeting from 6 to 9 p.m.

The informational meeting is an introduction to the foster care/adoption program. The orientation meeting is the next step in the process.

People who want to go through the orientation must attend the first meeting. Call Jeanne Hensley at 787-7920 for reservations.

FSCA is at 330 W. Michigan Ave.

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ourMidland.com
from the Midland Daily News

05/02/2007

Group making 'Love Packs' for foster children

By [Tony Lascari](#)

Larry Adams sees the need for foster parents who will nurture children and shape them into productive citizens.

A former foster child himself, Adams now serves as executive director of the Midland County Foster Adoptive Network. He said the network is recruiting residents interested in helping children during Foster Care Month.

"Our program serves not only the youth in foster care or youth of adoptive parents, we serve the entire family," he said. "We believe we cannot mold the youth into a hopeful, productive citizen without the entire family."

Throughout the year the network offers support and education services, but it also has a special program planned for the month -- assembling "Love Packs" for children.

The Love Pack program provides large duffle bags filled with a number of items for youth entering care.

"For anyone who's entered care, it can be a very traumatic experience," Adams said. "We want to lessen that trauma a little bit."

Anyone interested in the network or helping with the Love Pack program can e-mail Adams at larry@larrya.us.

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Recipients fear some doctors will deny treatment if funding is cut

Of The Oakland Press

"It is not as good as insurance companies would have paid."

Medicaid is the federal government's health insurance program for families and individuals with low incomes and few resources. It's managed by the states, which contribute matching funds.

An across-the-board cut would affect everything from office visits to surgeries for the 1.6 million residents who are eligible, including 950,000 children, say state health officials.

As of February, there were 92,160 adults and 41,239 children in Oakland County receiving Medicaid services.

"This means doctors will hesitate to see them, treat them or provide medical care because of lack of funding," said Troy Butler, 39, of Troy, who also has cerebral palsy.

T.J. Bucholz, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Community Health, gives several examples of the costs of care through private insurance and Medicaid, and what a 6 percent reduction means:

While private insurance might pick up the \$65 for a routine office visit, Medicaid pays the physician \$29.93. A 6 percent cut drops that reimbursement to \$28.13.

For a single coronary bypass, private insurance pays \$2,409.67, while Medicaid pays just \$1,098.46. A 6 percent cut drops that to \$1,032.55.

A trip to the hospital for an eye infection would cost about \$3,600 through Medicare, the federal program that insures seniors. Through Medicaid, the reimbursement is \$2,066, which would drop to \$1,942 after a 6 percent cut.

Physicians sometimes keep their current Medicaid caseload when reimbursements are cut, but refuse to accept new patients, Bucholz said.

"That's the risk when you lower payments to health care providers, that more opt out of the program," he said. "What it does is restrict access for new people in the program."

A Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physicians in 2005 found that only 64 percent of physicians who provide patient care report that they serve Medicaid patients, a decline of nearly 25 percent since 1999.

The governor's proposed cut would take effect June 1, unless the state Legislature acts to restore funding by then.

The proposed cut was coupled with a \$125 per pupil public education funding cut, part of an effort to balance this year's state budget. The cuts will take effect, unless lawmakers act to make up the funding within 30 days.

The governor has advocated a combination of reforms, cuts and taxes to resolve the budgets for this year and next year. Republicans controlling the state Senate want to balance this year's budget with cuts and reforms, without tax hikes.

Matt Marsden, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, said the Senate is working on a compromise with the Democrat-controlled House in conference committee, but that a compromise will include cuts at some level.

The House-passed plan calls for a 6.25 percent Medicaid cut while the Senate plan calls for a 1 percent cut with broader savings from cuts to the state community health department.

"There will be some cuts," Marsden said.

"They'll meet somewhere in the middle. This is the governor favoring the panic button over a reasonable and responsible approach to dealing with the budget shortfall."

Democrats were a little more diplomatic in their assessment.

"The governor is alerting the public to the severity of the budget crisis facing the state," said Dan Farough, spokesman for House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford. "Speaker Dillon is confident that by working together, we can resolve the budget crisis."

Cuts at any level will be difficult, service organizations say.

The Macomb Oakland Regional Center provides services covered through Medicaid to 4,500 mentally ill and developmentally disabled people in Oakland and Macomb counties.

"Those programs are funded on a flat basis," said MORC chief operating officer Dennis Bott. "We have to absorb any type of inflation into an already strained budget."

"We are worried about people dropping out of providing the services," Bott said. "We're afraid they won't be able to continue to work with us anymore."

At the Oakland County Community Mental Health Authority, about 70 percent of people receiving services do so through Medicaid.

CMH Executive Director Jeff Brown said a 6 percent reduction would amount to \$3.2 million. CMH provides services for 12,000 people through Medicaid.

"We're looking at different areas where we can cut back," Brown said. "There's certain things we'll no longer be able to do at the magnitude we were able to. We can streamline, but we're already subsidizing the Medicaid program in this county."

Oakland County's health division accepts Medicaid payments for substance abuse services and flu shots, and about 97 percent of the patients at the county-operated nursing home use Medicaid, said Thomas Gordon, the county's director of human services.

"A 6 percent reduction is hurtful in that respect, for sure," Gordon said. "We're in deep, deep fiscal manure and there doesn't appear to be any reasonable way out."

Howell said she hoped there's an "11th hour" solution and lawmakers change their minds about what they're going to cut.

"I hope they leave the disabled population alone, because they are the ones who can't afford these cuts," she said.

"For the most vulnerable population - the disabled - it affects them greatly because they have the most serious illnesses and have to take the most medications. Many will have to choose between what medicines they are going to take or whether they will eat."

Contact Jerry Wolfe at (248) 745-4612 or jerry.wolfe@oakpress.com. Contact Charles Crumm at (248) 745-4649 or charlie.crumm@oakpress.com.

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Medicaid recipients fear proposed cuts

By Jerry Wolffe and Charles Crumm
Journal Register News Service

Paulette Howell's son receives treatment for cerebral palsy through Medicaid.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm's proposed 6 percent cut across the board in state Medicaid funding has created a wave of fear among the disabled and family members like Howell that it'll be harder to get treatment.

"It's a dangerous situation for people who are disabled," said Howell, 58, of Waterford Township. Medicaid pays for the treatments for her 35-year-old son, Joe.

"As it is, most doctors won't accept Medicaid, because they don't think the reimbursement is enough," Howell said. "It is not as good as insurance companies would have paid."

Medicaid is the federal government's health insurance program for families and individuals with low incomes and few resources. It's managed by the states, which contribute matching funds.

An across-the-board cut would affect everything from office visits to surgeries for the 1.6 million residents who are eligible, including 950,000 children, say state health officials.

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Business

Three-Quarters of Large US Employers Don't Want to Fund Retiree Health Benefits

To Reduce Healthcare Costs, Employers Expect Current Employees to Get Healthy or Pay

NEW YORK -- A majority of large US employers want to provide their retired employees with access to health insurance, but they no longer want to fund the coverage, according to findings of a PricewaterhouseCoopers Management Barometer Survey released today. The survey also found that to cut health costs among their current workforce, employers are looking for greater accountability, telling employees to get healthy or pay the price.

Nearly two-thirds of employers surveyed agree that employees with unhealthy lifestyles, such as smoking, poor diet and inadequate exercise, should pay more for their health insurance coverage. This sentiment is up significantly from 2005, when fewer than half of employers (48 percent) felt this way.

Findings of the survey are in a report entitled "Tailoring the Approach: Employer Attitudes and Healthcare Strategies Address Distinct Issues," published by PricewaterhouseCoopers Health Research Institute. According to the survey:

- 73 percent of employers said that retiree health coverage is placing financial pressure on their organizations.
- 74 percent agree that companies should provide access to affordable retiree health coverage, but not necessarily fund it.
- Eight out of ten think there should be more tax incentives for employees to set aside money to fund their retirement healthcare needs.

"We are seeing a constant movement of employers getting out of the retiree medical space," said Barry Barnett, Principal in PricewaterhouseCoopers' Global Human Resource Solutions Group, specializing in health and welfare benefits. "Yet they feel an obligation to their employees even in retirement and are seeking ways to provide them with access to affordable coverage. In addition, they are encouraging current employees to invest now in the future in two ways: By making health lifestyle changes and by making sound financial decisions to prepare for their health coverage in retirement. Health Savings Accounts are the only vehicle to prefund retiree healthcare, so employers need to convince employees that they need to do more on their own, and then design plans that incent them to do so."

Support for Employer-Sponsored Healthcare, With Caveats

When asked whether employers should move away from providing healthcare coverage for current employees, 87 percent of survey respondents disagreed, demonstrating strong support for the nation's employer-sponsored healthcare system.

According to analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers Health Research Institute, employers are still debating over how to control future healthcare cost increases and incent current employees to take on more responsibility for their health.

PwC's experience is that employers are taking a more tailored approach to benefit plan design than two years ago, when increased cost sharing, applied uniformly across the employee population, was all the rage. The latter approach was perceived by current employees as their employers retreating from providing healthcare coverage.

"Healthcare coverage is becoming a precious commodity in our society, whereas it was once taken for granted," added Barnett. "In an economy with under 5 percent unemployment, employers recognize that their health plan is a differentiating factor in their ability to attract talent. They want to design competitive benefits plans that employees want, but, in turn, they want employees to work for the benefits."

PwC finds more employers looking to refine the programs they currently have in place rather than abandoning them.

-- More than nine in ten employers (94 percent) surveyed by PwC said they believe they can do a better job than they are doing now to support their employees in managing their own health to help reduce costs and improve business performance.

-- When asked about whether providing information on quality would reduce their company's healthcare costs, agreement dropped from 77 percent in 2005 to 62 percent in 2007. This may indicate that employers now realize that providing information isn't enough by itself to change behavior. The real challenge is in motivating employees to act on the information provided.

Though employers previously had been reluctant to get involved in employees' personal healthcare matters because of privacy and nondiscrimination laws, that is beginning to change, according to PwC. An increasing number of employers are cautiously designing plans that deter unhealthy behavior by charging higher premiums, a strategy used in conjunction with incentives to activate responsibility and motivate employees.

Eight in ten employers (80 percent) surveyed said they believe that providing financial incentives for employees participating in healthy lifestyle programs could reduce their company's healthcare costs at least somewhat. This was down slightly from 84 percent in 2005. Incentive programs range from cash rewards for completing health risk appraisals to rewards for accomplishing agreed-upon goals such as a specified amount of weight-loss or smoking cessation.

"Employers have a vested interest in the health of their employees, but truly changing behavior goes beyond dangling a carrot in front employees," said Bruce Spooner, director, PricewaterhouseCoopers Health Industries Advisory Practice. "Consumer-directed healthcare is not about cost shifting; it is about sharing responsibility for health. Progressive companies and health plans now know that they need to provide information, tools and support in addition to financial incentives to promote and reward healthy lifestyle choices and individual health. We are seeing healthy lifestyle and wellness programs increasingly incorporated into benefit structures, even for those employers who are not yet prepared to offer a specific consumer-directed health plan."

Methodology

PricewaterhouseCoopers' Management Barometer is a quarterly survey of over 100 top executives in a cross-section of large, multinational businesses. The survey is developed and compiled with assistance from the opinion and economic research of BSI Global Research, Inc. The Barometer provides quarterly guideposts on the direction of the economy, including revenue growth, new investments, new hiring plans, emerging business barriers and more. Changing, in-depth "hot topics" are also featured each quarter at Barometersurveys.com.

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Published May 3, 2007

Child-care center set to open at Verlinden

Doors will open May 14 in building vacant for 2 years

Nicole Geary
Lansing State Journal

Neat rows of cribs and bright toddler toys wait behind the brick walls of a once-bustling westside school.

It's another closed Lansing elementary school on the brink of being reborn and, unlike business ventures that have come before, these classrooms are ready for the return of children.

Scribbles and Giggles Child Care Learning Center will open at the former Verlinden school later this month after two years of silence in the building.

It's a dream come true for owner Brynn Kelley and a boon to local families interested in an educational environment for babies through big kids.

More than 100 local children attended an opening event last weekend.

"I'm, like, anxious. I can't wait for it to open up," said LaShonn-da Hardwick, whose oldest child, now 17, once attended grade school in the 77-year-old building. "You don't find too many day cares in the center of the city like they are.

"I'm thinking this is my daughter's home away from home."

So far, about 15 children are enrolled



(Photo by ROBERT KILLIPS/Lansing State Journal)
Over the head: Sydney Stevens, 2, shows off her unusual Frisbee-tossing technique Saturday at a community fun day at Scribbles and Giggles Child Care Learning Center at the former Verlinden school in Lansing.

How to enroll

Scribbles and Giggles Child Care Learning Center, 609 N. Verlinden Ave., will serve infants, toddlers, preschoolers and older children (ages 6 weeks through 12 years old) when it opens May 14. Grand opening specials are available.

Full-time weekly rates are:

- Infants (Wobbler Room) - \$165
- Toddlers (Giggles Room) - \$155
- Preschool (Scribbles Room) - \$135
- Latch-key program (Explorers Room) - \$100

For daily and half-day rates and other information, go to www.scribblesandgiggleschildcare.com, or call 482-1551.

Lansing sells former schools

Lansing School District has sold five of eight vacant school buildings since last spring, bringing in \$1,463,500. One sale is pending, and two other schools are on the market. Here's a look at the details:

1. Maple Grove, 6031 S. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., sale to Life Changers Christian Center is pending. Price: \$400,000.
2. Verlinden, 609 N. Verlinden Ave., sold in February to Scribbles and Giggles Educational Child Care for \$301,000.
3. Walnut Elementary, 1012 N. Walnut St., sold in September to Niowave Inc. for \$300,000.
4. Allen, 1614 E. Kalamazoo St., sold in March 2006 to Neogen Corp. for \$325,000

for daytime and before- and after-school programs that could serve more than 100 with two floors, a gym and an outdoor playground.

It may seem like a slow beginning but Kelley, a 25-year-old former home day-care provider from DeWitt, already has come a long way.

The 29,500-square-foot Verlinden was almost snatched by the competition last summer, including local startup company Niowave Inc. and a Florida developer who offered the Lansing School District \$750,000.

Then Kelley, who paid \$301,000, waded through neighborhood meetings and a special-use permit process with the city that lasted six months longer than anticipated.

Construction projects, including installation of new security and fire alarm systems, also have delayed final licensing and the opening.

The business will use space on the main floor only, possibly growing into the second level later.

Kelley believes the school setting, complete with lockers and in-class bathrooms, is a major selling point. She launched a Web site, held an Easter egg hunt and took brochures to area businesses to get the word out.

"It's been nerve-racking," she said. "We just want to provide good quality care for kids. We're here to support families while they work to support their own families."

Verlinden was one of five Lansing schools closed to ease budget troubles in 2005, and among eight on the market at one point.

The former Main Street school also now houses a child-care center near downtown Lansing. Other buildings were sold to high-tech companies - Neogen Corp. and Niowave - and to the City Rescue Mission for a homeless shelter for women and children.

Three other vacant schools still are awaiting buyers.

Neighbors were worried Verlinden would become an eyesore or be tapped for industrial use, like the nearby General Motors Corp. complex set to be demolished. GM hasn't yet announced redevelopment plans for the sites, but the school represents fresh life for the neighborhood since the plant closures.

"There was great disappointment in its closing," Carol Skillings, president of the Westside Neighborhood Association, said of Verlinden. But "the new neighbors are keeping up the building, and it has a positive, daily use."

Scribbles and Giggles could affect business at Little People's Learning Center, a preschool and day care licensed for 35 kids just up the street.

But owner and director Rosemarie Hale doesn't see it that way. Like many neighbors, she's happy to see the old school come back to life.

5. Maplewood, 2216 S. Cedar St., sold in April 2006 to the City Rescue Mission for \$200,000.
6. Northwestern, 2908 Andrew Ave., is on the market for \$295,000.
7. Holmes Street, 1030 S. Holmes Street, is on the market for \$295,000.
8. Main Street, 1715 W. Main St., sold in June 2006 to Educational Child Care Center (EC3) for \$337,500.
Sources: State Journal research, Lansing School District

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"There is not competition. I'm doing business; they're doing business," she said.

"There are enough children in Lansing for all of us."

Contact Nicole Geary at 377-1066 or ngeary@lsj.com.

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[\[Back\]](#)



Child care center closing

Thursday, May 03, 2007

DENISE FORD-MITCHELL

THE SAGINAW NEWS

The battle is over for the Salvation Army's Kids Korner Child Care Center.

Saginaw's oldest day-care operation, which opened its doors in 1939, will shutter them Friday, June 8.

Escalating costs, budget deficits and dwindling enrollment proved too much for officials to overcome.

"We really tried to make a go of it with the itty bitties," said Maj. Wayne H. Ruston, 45, who with his wife, Maj. Tracy Ruston, head the Saginaw branch of the Christian organization based at 2030 N. Carolina. "We need to average 45 to 50 children every day. We're hovering at 23, and it's just not enough.

"One of the grandfathers asked me how many hundred dollar donors does he need to rustle up to square things. When he found out we need thousands, he quickly said never mind."

Ruston sounded the alarm in March, warning parents and the community of the center's dire situation. Officials revamped the center's marketing by returning to its Christian roots, which they had sidelined nearly two years ago to qualify for federally funded Head Start money.

"It was actually costing us more money and staff to have the program at a time when we already were losing money," said Ann Bierman, director of marketing and development for Saginaw's Salvation Army. "The number of federal requirements kept growing, so we decided it was best for us to drop that partnership and go back to Bible-based curriculum."

Organizers added Bible-story and character-building lessons, hands-on projects and "Music with the Majors." The nine-person day-care staff also completed extensive training to better assess and track the progress of youngsters, Ruston said.

But that didn't help, he said.

It became increasingly difficult to compete with home-based child-care providers and extended family members, and couples aren't having as many children, he said. To compound matters, Saginaw School District leaders last year closed the nearby Fuerbringer Elementary School, 2138 N. Carolina in Saginaw.

The Salvation Army provided child care and transportation for many youngsters who went to Fuerbringer. The center attracted parents needing child care services from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays. It also offered before- and after-school transportation to local schools.

"I don't know that we've ever broken even. The sad thing is that if we were doing this for profit, we would have got out of the child-care business 50 years ago. For the last eight months, we have seen a decline in enrollment, and in spite of actively recruiting new families, we sadly have to close after nearly 70 years of service."

The center has laid off one full-time and four part-time employees. The center is licensed to care for 73 2-week-old to 12-year-old youngsters daily. Last year, the number of children at the center hovered around 30. Today, there are 18 to 22 youngsters enrolled full- and part-time.

It's a far cry from when the center opened 68 years ago to care for the children of women working in local munitions factories during Word War II and for family members temporarily too ill to care for their children. Back then the center was at 203 N. Baum in downtown Saginaw.

In October 1970, officials moved into the former Grace Baptist Church on North Carolina at State on Saginaw's West Side.

In November 1994, volunteers overhauled the center's playground. In January 2004, Salvation Army leaders worked out a partnership with Head Start that added 10 to 12 youngsters. About 40 volunteers helped repaint the center in vivid colors and added new doorbells and curtains to spruce up the center.

Throughout the years, the Christian organization has relied heavily on donations from charitable agencies and churches to help fund its budget.

In June 2005, officials and an army of volunteers again spruced up the playground, with the help of a \$71,000 grant from the Harvey Randall Wickes Foundation.

Location was important 14 years ago to Freeland residents Lori and Rick Branshaw when his employer transferred him to Saginaw from Chicago area.

"We needed someplace near our home on Wheeler and Marquette," Lori Branshaw said. "We decided to look at the Salvation Army's day care program. It was always clean and the employees were friendly. We were so impressed, even when we moved to Freeland a couple of years later we still drove our daughters Lindsay and Chelsea to the Salvation Army."

"It's really too bad that they didn't make it," said Carol Emrich, a teacher cadet in the Saginaw Career Complex's early childhood program.

In 1993, she served for two years as the Kids Korner daycare center's director.

"Even back then we were very concerned to see they were struggling. It's so sad that the center's long child care tradition and history in the city has ended. Unfortunately, the loss of population and the closing of Fuerbringer were major circumstances.

While saddened by the closure of the day care center, Ruston is optimistic about the future.

"We have been so blessed to help raise so many children, who have grown into so many caring and supportive adults, but as God closes a door he opens a window," Ruston said.

Officials will use the building to conduct summer day camps for children 7 to 12 and expand its after-school programs.

"It's going to be a busy time. But we still need help. Anyone who wants to donate pool tables, ping-pong tables or other games, we'll put them to good use." v

Denise Ford-Mitchell is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9668.

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DHS Child Support Saves \$1.2M

MIRS, May 2, 2007

The Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Child Support saved \$1.2 million from October 2005 to December 2006 by using an electronic child support payment system, the department announced today.

Starting in 2007, state law required the DHS Office of Child Support, in coordination with local Friends of the Court, to disburse child support payments electronically to a custodial parent's personal banking account or to a debit card, unless the recipient met hardship requirements.

The new system started with three counties in November 2005 and additional counties were phased into the program during 2006 and early 2007. Customers were able to choose between direct deposit to their personal bank account or a debit card.

Prior to the new system, about 27 percent of support disbursements were done through direct deposit, with the remaining issued by a paper check and sent through the mail.

In March 2007, about 88 percent of disbursements were electronic, with approximately 54 percent going directly to customers' personal bank accounts and 34 percent deposited to debit cards. More than 191,000 debit cards have been issued.

It is expected that the percentage of electronic disbursements will increase as Wayne County customers continue to activate debit cards sent during 2007.

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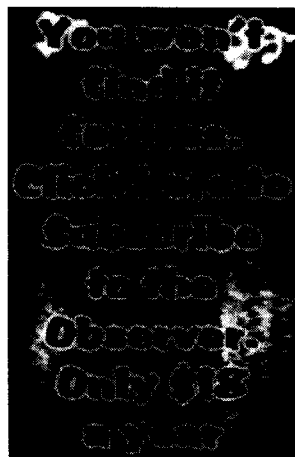
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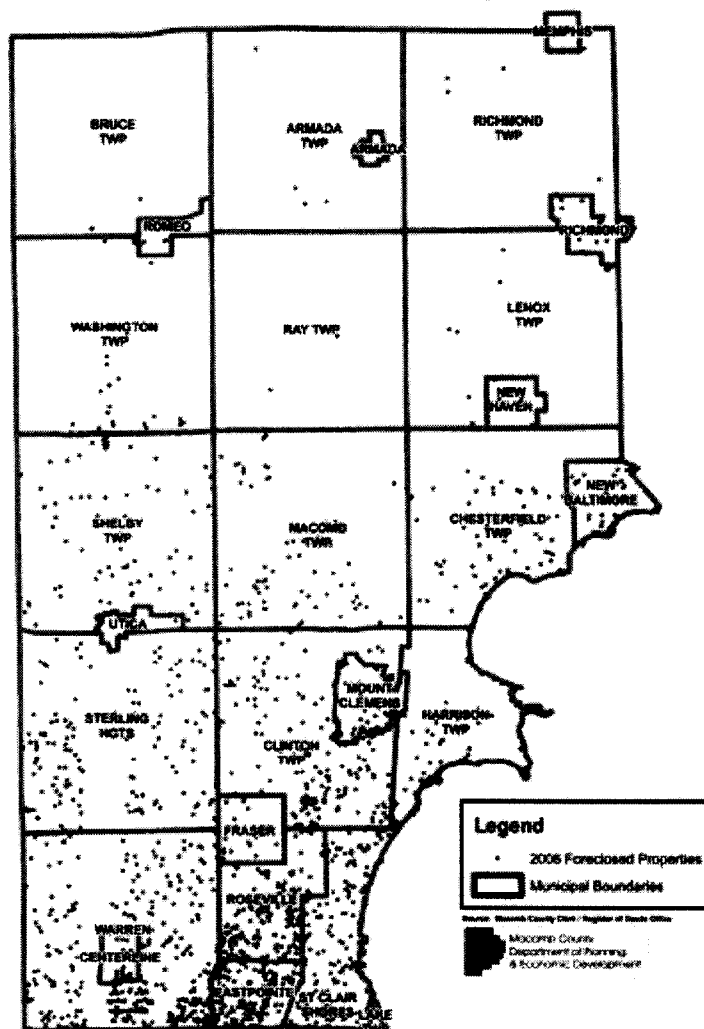
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2006 Foreclosed Properties Macomb County, Michigan



FORECLOSURES. The dots on the map represent homes in Macomb County that completed the foreclosure process in 2006.

(Map courtesy of the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development)

Many options available

NEWS SUMMARY

HEADLINES

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two Board
of Education seats
May 8

Romeo facing
more
student funding
cuts

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turned into
museum
for Scout 22 years
ago

Many options
available
to those facing
foreclosure

The foreclosure
process . . .

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couple
festival's king,
queen

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survey deadline is
May 4

Commission to
meet a day later

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locations for
Romeo school
board race

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to those facing foreclosure

by **MICHELLE TANGUAY**
Observer News Editor

From 2004 to 2006, foreclosures in Macomb County more than doubled, going from 1,495 to 3,405, according to the Macomb County Register of Deeds office.

And for the first quarter of 2007, more than 1,000 foreclosures have already been logged, said Elaine Began of the Register of Deeds office.

"We've had to add a whole new file cabinet because we've never had so many," she said.

A map of the county created by the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development showing the 2006 foreclosures reveals that the northern portion of the county did not have a large number of foreclosures as compared to the southern end.

However, Terry Gibb of the Macomb County Michigan State University Extension said one thing to take into consideration is that lot sizes are smaller in the southern end of the county.

"You have to remember they (houses) are sitting on quarter-acre lots," she said.

No matter where a homeowner lives in the county, there is help available if foreclosure is a possibility.

Recently, the Macomb MSU Extension sponsored several foreclosure prevention workshops for both residents who may be facing foreclosure as well as for local officials and lenders. More are planned for the near future. Ray Township Supervisor Charlie Bohm and Treasurer Rita Harman and Bruce Township Treasurer Debbie Obrecht were among the local officials to attend one of the workshops held March 29.

"I was very impressed," Harman said of the workshop.

"The biggest thing I took away (if a person is facing foreclosure) is contact your mortgage company," Harman said. "They want to help you."

Gibb agrees.

"Bankers never envision being landlords," Gibb said.

"They don't want to be."

Harman said a foreclosed home sitting empty reflects on the rest of the neighborhood.

"It affects the ability of neighbors to sell their homes," she said.

She said the information provided during the workshop was important and since then she and Bohm have drafted and sent a letter to those homeowners who did not pay their winter property taxes this year. Included in the letter was the information received at the workshop should those homeowners also be facing foreclosure.

"If you help one person, it's worth it," Harman said.

During the workshops, the extension offers information on the homeowner's alternatives when faced with foreclosure, which include keeping the house, selling the house or allowing the foreclosure to proceed. For each alternative, the extension offers a number of detailed strategies.

"There's a lot of things you can do," Gibb said. "Don't

Romeo Observer

Special



Section

just let it happen. Decide what you're going to do. Don't make it a passive decision."

Three sources may be able to provide financial help to those facing foreclosure, according to the extension. They include the Michigan Department of Human Services, the Macomb County Community Services Agency (MCCSA) and charitable organizations and churches.

The Michigan Department of Human Services has offices in Mount Clemens, Sterling Heights and Warren. For information, call the Mount Clemens office at (586) 469-7700, the Sterling Heights office (586) 254-1500 or the Warren office at (586) 427-0600.

The MCCSA North Action Center in the New Haven Health Center serves residents living north of 23 Mile Road. Contact the center at (586) 749-5146. A person should apply to this agency after applying (but before receiving a response) for state emergency relief, according to the extension.

Homeowners can also contact charities, churches and other organizations. Locally, Samaritan House provides emergency food, clothing and utility assistance to those having financial problems. Call (586) 677-7590. Other options include Veterans Affairs, (586) 469-5315, and St. Vincent de Paul (contact the nearest Catholic Church).

Cities and townships also offer property tax hardship exemptions. In Armada Township, call (586) 784-5200; Bruce Township, (586) 752-4588; Ray Township, (586) 749-5171 and Washington Township, (586) 786-0016. Callers should ask for the assessing department.

Gibb said the extension also offers one-on-one counseling regarding foreclosure options. Call (586) 469-5180.

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Embezzler ordered to repay more than \$400K

Tuesday, May 01, 2007

By Lynn Turner

lturner@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8564

Actions speak louder than words or sobs, Kalamazoo County Circuit Judge Gary C. Giguere Jr. told Alberta Banks.

Banks, 57, of Wimbleton Way, stood before the judge Monday afternoon, having pled guilty to embezzlement from a vulnerable adult from June 2003 to November 2004 in Portage.

The woman Banks took money from, Mildred Riedell-Guimond, of Portage, died April 15, 2004, at age 86. But not before Banks took hundreds of thousands of dollars from her. ``You can tell a lot about someone in the way they treat someone who's weak," Giguere said as Banks sobbed softly into a tissue.

Reading from a presentencing interview statement, Giguere noted that Banks said she only pleaded guilty to be done with the situation and questioned the ability of her attorney. Only a short time before, Banks had stood before the judge and claimed responsibility for her actions.

At this point, Giguere said, he could only conclude she was lying when she pleaded to the charge and committed perjury, or didn't feel ``genuine remorse and understanding of her actions."

Candy Keysor-Oudman, an attorney who sorted out the paper trail that led to Banks, said that at one point Riedell-Guimond put about \$175,000 into an account Banks could access. Within four months, only \$55,000 was left.

Banks was sentenced to repaying \$423,090.71 in victim restitution, five years of probation and was ordered to enter the Kalamazoo Probation Enhancement Program. She was also ordered not to run her own business, not to have direct access to someone else's money and to not be around anyone older than age 65 -- unless it is a relative -- without her probation officer's permission.

Banks asked for forgiveness, saying she never meant to hurt anyone and it would never happen again. Working in home health care was all she has ever done.

``The fact that all you know is home health aid doesn't go far with me," Giguere said.

``I'm not impressed with your honesty."



2007 Governor's Service Awards to Be Presented June 20th in Detroit

2007-05-02 20:19:24 -

LANSING, Mich., May 2 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- First Gentleman Daniel G. Mulhern today announced the finalists for the 2007 Governor's Service Awards who will be honored next month during ceremonies at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. The 40 finalists have been selected from nearly 180 individuals, businesses, and nonprofit organizations from across the state who were nominated for their commitment to volunteer service.

"Volunteers are heroes who give of themselves without thought of praise or recognition," said First Gentleman Daniel G. Mulhern, chair of the Michigan Community Service Commission, (MCSC) which hosts the annual recognition. "The value of volunteers and their impact on local communities is highlighted by the willingness of Michigan's corporate leaders to step forward and sponsor this event. We are grateful for the volunteers and the support of our sponsors."

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm will honor the finalists during an [awards ceremony](#) entitled, "The Miracle of Volunteering," on Wednesday, June 20, at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. The 2007 Governor's Service Awards will be a theatre-style event with The Miracles as the featured performers. Other local [musical artists](#) and performers will also pay tribute to the honorees.

In addition to recognizing the Governor's Service Award recipients in eight categories, Governor Granholm will also present the Carter [Partnership](#) Award, the Russell G. Mawby Award for Philanthropy, and the Community Foundation Award for Philanthropy.

The Governor's Service Awards are an annual statewide recognition acknowledging the contributions made by Michigan volunteers. This celebration is made possible only through the generous contributions of its sponsors.

To date, the [Platinum](#) Sponsor is State Farm Insurance. The Premier Sponsors are Comcast, [DaimlerChrysler](#), DTE Energy Foundation, EDS, Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation, Lear Corporation, MASCO Corporation Foundation, and Meijer. The Governor's Champions are Comer Holdings, ConnectMichigan Alliance, CMS [Energy](#)/Consumers Energy, Greektown Casino, and Pfizer. The Governor's Heroes are the Health Alliance Plan, Mawby Family Fund/Battle Creek Community Foundation, and Michigan [Nonprofit](#) Association.

The Michigan Community Service Commission is committed to building a culture of volunteer service to strengthen communities. The MCSC is part of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

To purchase tickets to attend the event or for more information about the Governor's Service Awards, visit <http://www.michigan.gov/mcsc> or call (517) 373-4200.

The award finalists are:

Governor George Romney Lifetime Achievement Award

- Fred Bentz of Ann Arbor
- Lenore Croudy of [Flint](#)
- Margaret Demant of Huntington Woods
- James R. C. Hazel, Jr. of [Battle Creek](#)
- Billy J. Joseph of Kentwood

Exemplary Community Service Program Award

- Brother Dan's Food Pantry of Petoskey
- Kids [Food Basket](#) of Grand Rapids
- Michigan Habitat's AmeriCorps Program, based in Lansing
- Tuesday Toolmen of Kalamazoo
- [Wigs](#) 4 Kids of St. Clair Shores

Exemplary Volunteer Service Award

- Mollie Barrett of Mt. Clemens
- Amy Butler of Eaton Rapids
- Kevin Fite of Southfield
- Doug Heslip of Marquette

-- Amyre Makupson of Southfield

Innovative Mentoring Program Award

- The [Henry Ford](#) Youth Mentorship Program in Westland
- Kids Hope USA of Holland
- Motherly Intercession of Flint
- Winning Futures - Mentoring Solutions of Warren
- Yellow Ribbon Kids of Negaunee

Outstanding Corporate Citizenship Award

- Comcast Communications, Inc. of Detroit
- Grand Traverse Stamping of Traverse City
- Kellogg Company of Battle Creek
- Medallion Management, Inc. of Kalamazoo
- [United](#) Bancorp, Inc. of Tecumseh

Outstanding Mentor Award

- Tim Davis of [Cadillac](#)
- Jim Harkes of Allendale
- Willie Irby, Jr. of Troy
- Carlos Quinney, Jr. of Lansing
- Michele Ripka of Grand Haven

Senior Volunteer Award of Excellence

- Herman Dooka of Detroit
- Jai B. Jaglan of Okemos
- Roger F. Roty of Jackson
- Rita [Van](#) Boven of Fremont
- Peg Yake of Lexington

Youth Volunteer Award of Excellence

- Bridget Gaitor of Taylor
- Lorie Petersen of Ionia
- Laura Salani of Marquette
- Jocelyn Sample of Detroit
- Sandeep Singh of Battle Creek

Special Note:

Additional information on the finalists can be found at <http://www.michigan.gov/mcsc> or by calling (517) 335-7875.

Source: Michigan Community Service Commission

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Published May 2, 2007

Rules passed allowing layoffs of non-union state workers

Midday update

Chris Andrews
Lansing State Journal

The Michigan Civil Service Commission today approved rules for temporary layoffs of non-unionized state government employees.

The new rules apply to about 15,000 supervisory, managerial and confidential employees.

The Granholm administration sought the rules changes in advance of a possible partial government shutdown because of the state's poor financial condition and the inability of Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Legislature to resolve the budget crisis in other ways.

The rules would allow for temporary layoffs of up to 20 days.

Contact Chris Andrews at 377-1054 or candrews@lsj.com.

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[\[Back\]](#)



Commission authorizes possible layoffs of non-union state workers

5/2/2007, 2:55 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The state's Civil Service Commission approved rule changes Wednesday that would authorize potential temporary layoffs of nonunion state workers.

The 3-0 vote would allow some workers to be laid off for up to 20 days, though the decision on whether to lay off workers would be made by Gov. Jennifer Granholm's administration.

The state has more than 15,300 workers who are classified as non-exclusively represented employees. They work in all state departments as managers, supervisors and other groups that aren't represented by labor unions, such as some groups of accountants and auditors.

If any of those employees were to be laid off, they would not be paid for the days of missed work. But they would continue to get health insurance and other benefits.

The layoffs would not apply to about 35,000 state employees who are represented by labor unions.

Granholm has asked state departments to come up with plans to try and cope if the state's budget situation worsens.

The state could have a projected budget shortfall of \$700 million for this fiscal year after new projections later this month.

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CSC Approves Temporary Layoff Rules

MIRS, May 2, 2007

The Michigan Civil Service Commission (CSC) today unanimously gave the Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** administration what it requested, the ability to allow for a 20-day temporary layoff of some 15,000 state employees who do not have union representation.

The vote came despite pleas from state employees who argued they already had sacrificed enough through previous furlough days, concessions and the aftermath of two early-out retirement programs that have left fewer state employees to provide services to more state residents.

State Employer Scott **BOWEN** made the case for the administration, citing a \$700 million shortfall in the current year budget.

"The need for the rule is clear," Bowen said. He hastened to add that approval of the rules "does not mean a layoff will occur because no decision has been made. The Governor is taking appropriate measures to plan" if a resolution to the budget crisis is not met.

"Immediate passage is urgent," he concluded.

Dennis **KELLEY**, a Department of Transportation (MDOT) employee, acknowledged that temporary layoffs are better than indefinite layoffs, but quickly added both "are unfair to any state employees because we have done our share in recent years."

Dale **TREEHOUSE**, president of Michigan Association of Government Employees (MAGE), which represents many management, supervisory and confidential non-union employees, said, "once again state employees are being made scapegoats when we have already done our share."

Treehouse said fewer state employees are employed, which means those who are employed are doing more work and then they "are pilloried by the press and Legislature" when something goes wrong. "It's time for the Legislature and (the CRC) to decide the course of action. Employees have gone to the well too often."

MAGE Attorney Brandon **ZUK** alleged that these Nonexclusively Represented Employees (NEREs) are receiving disproportionate treatment to the union-represented state employees.

He cited the number of temporary 20-day layoffs. Under the rule, NERE employees could be laid off for up to 20 days - but not necessarily consecutively. Under union contracts, rank-and-file employees who are laid off temporarily must receive consecutive days off.

Those contracts range from a cap of 6 to 19 days, depending on the contract.

In addition, Zuk said the NEREs couldn't use leave time to make up the layoff days, where union employees can.

Zuk also pointed out that without consecutive-day layoffs, it would be nearly impossible for a NERE employee to qualify for unemployment benefits.

But Sandra **PARKER**, president of UAW Local 600, which represents 16,500 state employees, took issue with the unfairness issue.

"A lot of NEREs had the opportunity to be represented and they chose not to," Parker said. She urged Commissioners to remember that "we chose to be represented...and we gave up something to get something in our contracts."

Ken **FLETCHER**, of the Michigan AFL-CIO, said he would prefer that no state employee be part of the budget solution, saying state employees — now numbering 53,000 from 58,000 — are working more efficiently and more effectively.

"It is up to the Legislature to act on the Governor's budget solutions," Fletcher said. "The Michigan Legislature has failed to do its job."

Tom **WELCH**, a Department of Community Health employee, probably drew the most attention when he told Commissioners he and his wife are both state employees with four children under the age of seven.

"This will severely impact our ability to raise kids, meet our mortgage and other needs," Welch said. "I implore the Civil Service Commission to act as an independent body and urge other solutions."

He provided the following economic statistics the layoffs would have. Twenty days of unpaid time off multiplied by eight hours a day equals 160 hours at an average \$30 per hour. Take that number multiplied by the 15,369 NEREs and it equals a \$74 million hole in the state economy. Ninety percent of those employees live in the greater Lansing area, according to Welch.

Diane **GARRISON**, executive director of the Michigan State Police command officers, said the rule as presented would impact state police retirees pensions. She said a top command officer with 25 years could lose \$306.16 a month under the layoff rule. Over 20 years she said that number would climb to a total of \$73,478.40. CSC Attorney Dan **McLELLAN** told commissioners that legislative action would be needed to correct the issue.

CSC Chair Susan Grimes **MUNSELL** said she and other commissioners are concerned about the "equity" issue, an issue "the Commission takes very seriously."

After the meeting, Munsell told reporters that nonconsecutive day issue is something she is asking the Department of Civil Service (DCS) staff to look at.

Munsell said if it is apparent there is clear abuse or an unfairness issue, the Commission can take corrective action at its July 18 meeting or before in a special meeting if necessary.

The new rule allows:

- Twenty unpaid workdays per fiscal year
- No employment preference or bumping
- The temporary layoff does not affect a break in service and continues to provide seniority, benefits and retirement as though the employee were working.
- Automatic return to work in the same job at the end of the layoff

However, the employee cannot substitute paid status or elect to take annual leave payoff to cover the cost of the layoff. Of note is that the notice provision has been waived. In effect, this means an employee could be told at the end of a business day that he or she will be temporarily laid off starting on the following day. Union-negotiated contracts require a 30-day notice provision.

Another \$1 billion hole in the state budget ... Why should we care?



Written by Kyle Melinn

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One after another, the teenage girls took a seat in front of the microphone.

Timidly, they spent an hour explaining to 30 adults the pains of being a single mother in high school and how the state program the adults had the power to eliminate was worth saving.

Meanwhile, their little kids were getting squeamish. The one sitting behind me gleefully wiggled out of his mother's arms. Another made a beeline for the door.

This real-life testimony — as opposed to canned remarks from lobbyists and government officials — inside the august Michigan House Appropriations Committee room is almost unheard of.

But there they were. Teenagers, thrown into adulthood because of a bad decision, telling perfect strangers last February how the promise of this state program spared them the pain of an abortion or, possibly, a repeat of the domestic violence they themselves suffered growing up.

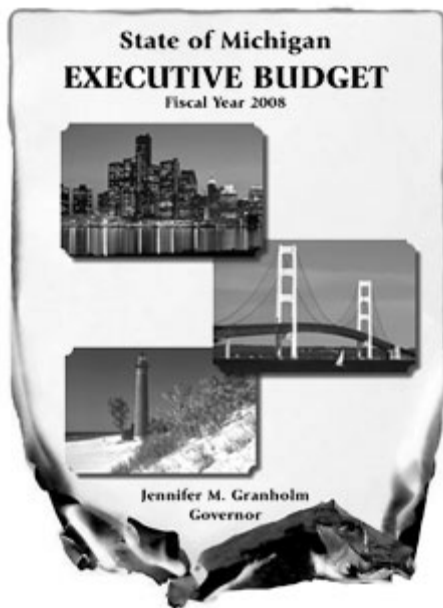
Days earlier, Gov. Jennifer Granholm had penned a budget-cutting executive order nixing the state's meager \$25,000 share of the teenage parent counseling program in the Department of Human Services— even though doing so meant losing \$1.75 million in free federal money for the program.

The budget was in crisis once again, and Granholm was required by law and the state Constitution to cut spending. This parent-counseling program was a proposed casualty.

“What about the father?” one well-meaning state representative from West Michigan asked.

“Isn't he helping to make ends meet?”

“He helps when he can,” the teenage girl replied. “But with school and everything, it's hard to earn a lot of money.”



That's high school, Mr. Representative.

By the time the girls were done pouring their hearts out, the somber state representatives probably would have donated the necessary \$25,000 if a hat had been passed.

The impact had been felt. This wasn't just another line on the state budget. This program affected real people.

Thankfully, the cut never happened. The Senate killed Granholm's first executive order for political reasons. Granholm was required to issue a second budget-cutting executive order, which she did. This one, however, did not cut the teenage parent counseling grant.

Every other cut from that same department, however, was kept in.

Why Should We Care?

Yes, the state budget is in crisis again. Why should you care?

For the last five years, the governor and the Legislature have trimmed "government fat," moved money around and pulled another accounting gimmick out of their hat. We can do that again.

Right?

Wrong. Years of pushing the accelerator on state spending and blind tax cuts has cooked the state's budget to the point where the gears of state government could lock up this summer.

Remember the Newt Gingrich-Bill Clinton government shutdown of 1995? And if it does not happen this summer, it's still only a matter of time if state government stays on its current course.

The state may be forced to borrow against its own employees' pension fund to pay its bills this summer. Officials have restructured debt so many times, they're willing to pay an extra \$50 million on a seven-year loan to save \$40 million today.

The state's economy is bad, and it's showing no signs of getting better anytime soon. The governor wants to raise some taxes immediately so the state can pay its bills. The Republican-led Senate wants to cut its way out of the budget. Neither side is blinking.

Until someone stops playing political chicken, state government will shut down by

summer. State officials are laying the groundwork for temporary layoffs. The state already has stopped paying its bills for certain grants and newspaper subscriptions, among other items.

The state's bond rating, once AAA, dropped another notch last week to AA- with a negative outlook. The state funding that K-12 schools have worked their budgets around all year is getting cut about 2 percent. Physicians and doctors, already getting 70 cents on the dollar for every Medicaid patient they see, are seeing their state-reimbursed checks continually shrink.

Play It Again, Sam

If you think you've heard this song and dance before, it's because you have. You've heard it every year since 2000, the last year before the bubble popped on the ballooning dot.com industry and the United States dived into its mini-recession of the early naughts.

The bean counters and fiscal forecasters hoisted their warning flags. Years of spending sprees and blind tax cuts had turned the state budget's foundation to sand. The structure for paying for everything from the state's roads to its Medicaid system was built on a history of good times and the dreams of more to come.

Then Gov. John Engler and the old guard in the Legislature talked about maybe doing something about it. But faced with the daunting task of using their literally hundreds of years of experience in public service to build a more stable foundation for the state budget and help the rookies who would follow them, these seasoned lawmakers gave themselves a 37 percent raise (and the resulting massive pension boost for many of them), spent down the nearly \$2 billion in savings they had racked up and wished their successors luck.

So even though Engler & Co. technically did balance the budget before leaving office in 2002, they left the cupboards bare. Their years of rosy budget forecasts caught up with Granholm and the rest of the newbies the very week many of them were sworn into office.

On the third Thursday of every January and May, three of the state's budget forecasters hold a public meeting. They listen to hours of less-than-titillating presentations from a few economists, retreat into a backroom and emerge with their best guess on how much money the state can spend in the next 18 months or so.

A fresh-on-the-job Granholm sat through portions of this "Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference" in January 2003. Afterward, she immediately called an "emergency meeting" of the Legislature's top brass to help her solve her first budget "crisis."

The size of the hole she needed to fill in the then-2003 budget: \$284.4 million.
The size of the hole she needed to fill in the 2007 budget after this same conference this

past January: nearly \$1 billion.

Staring At A Car Wreck

It's been fascinating watching this train wreck. Whether it's wishful thinking, political pressure, bad information or bad luck, just when forecasters think Michigan's economy has "turned the corner," we hit a new low.

During the last meeting in January, the forecasters said Michigan may not see an economic recovery until 2020. Now they're coming back in another week or two to drop the bar even lower.

The state's failing auto industry is truly the only thing to blame here. Louisiana and Mississippi can blame their economic hardships on Hurricane Katrina. We can blame ours on the imported automobile.

The Japanese and Germans learned how to build a better, cheaper car. Our automakers and unions stayed fixated on fighting over every last dime. Our days of auto superiority are finished. Now we're getting the bitter taste of a true competitive market, complete with fewer jobs and even fewer good-paying jobs.

Under Proposal A of the mid-1990s, the more stuff we buy, the more tax money goes to our schools. When we have less money to buy stuff, schools suffer.

Our roads are paid for the same way. The more gas we pump, the more fuel tax money goes to our roads. Fewer people are driving to jobs these days. Those who do have a job are changing routes, changing cars, doing anything to limit the number of visits to Mr. \$3 A Gallon. We have less money for our roads, and they show it.

As jobless numbers rise, so does the need for welfare and public health services. That costs money.

Remember the '80s and '90s when the answer to any societal ill was to throw more crooks in jail for longer periods? That costs money.

And all the while, the magic pill that was going to solve all of our problems was the almighty placebo known as tax cuts. Government has too much money? Cut taxes, give the money back to businesses and the people. Government doesn't have enough money? Cut taxes, give money back to businesses and the people so they can turn around and spend it again.

If it were only that easy. Granholm got sucked into this tax cut hysteria all four years of her first term, too, signing hundreds of boutique business tax breaks that may or may not have created a job or two. The climax came in December 2005 when she agreed to a pointless \$600 million slice to a \$2.5 billion-a-year business tax the Legislature voted to eliminate (without a replacement) eight months later, anyway.

Mercifully, nobody is seriously talking tax cut in Lansing these days. Rather, they are all wearing their Sherlock Holmes hat and carrying their Scooby Doo magnifying glass, scrambling to find a rubber stopper as the state's revenue spirals down the drain.

Those Darn Term Limits

The easy target here is term limits. There's a school of thought in town that maybe if the old timers hadn't been given the boot when term limits started cleaning house in 2000 and 2002, maybe Lansing wouldn't be trapped in this whirlpool of perpetual budget crises.

Hogwash. Term limits didn't give us the Single Business Tax, Proposal A, the dot.com burst or the domestic automaker collapse.

Term limits certainly make things awkward when new lawmakers occasionally need direction on how the process works. But for every bright legislator blown out of the Michigan House or Senate by term limits, another bright legislator is blown in. For every not-so-bright legislator who leaves, another not-so-bright legislator takes over.

The bright and/or ambitious rise to the top. The not-so-bright and/or not-so-ambitious give their 2 cents and then vote as they are told.

The real decisions over the state budget are still made by a relatively small group of people, steered by the special interests that put them in power.

For the Republicans, it's mostly the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, Right to Life, schools of choice and other like-minded small government folks.

For the Democrats, it's the arch nemesis of each of the aforementioned groups — organized labor, pro-choice organizations, environmentalists and the Michigan Education Association.

More important, long-term planning – outside of an individual lawmaker's own political future – flew out the window with term limits. Immediate problems are fixed with Band-Aids and pain killers. The longer-term problems are left for "the next guy" to deal with. After all, why solve today what won't be your problem tomorrow?

The Issues

So why aren't they doing something today? At the heart of this budget impasse is something called the Michigan Education Special Service Association (MESSA). This MEA spinoff is a third-party administrator that takes care of health care pooling for a little less than half of the state's school districts.

Republicans see MESSA as a pinnacle of waste that, with reforms, could save school districts hundreds of millions of dollars a year. They want the state laws that basically keep the non-profit MESSA in operation reformed immediately.

Democrats believe MESSA is being used as a political scapegoat because Republicans have had a bone to pick with the politically powerful MEA for years. They have steadfastly blocked any reforms that would impact MESSA and the MEA.

To make things stickier, guess who was the first major union to come out in favor of Granholm's gubernatorial campaign in 2002? Yup, the MEA.

Deeper

But in the end, the budget crises in Lansing runs much deeper than "fixing term limits," eliminating the Senate, reforming MESSA, creating a part-time Legislature or diving headlong into some other half-baked government restructuring scheme.

The future of Michigan isn't in the hands of the Legislature. It's not in the hands of Granholm, the Republican-led state Senate or the Democratic-led state House. Sure, they're in charge of reacting to the cards they're dealt. They're certainly easier to blame.

Nine times out of 10, the decisions they make are shaped by the opinion polls taken of you, me and every other registered Michigan voter. Is it any wonder that everyone with a "Rep." or "Sen." before his name shot each other an "OK-who's-going-first" look when Granholm called for her 2-cent sales tax on basically everything that isn't taxed already?

If there's any opinion poll out there showing Michiganders are screaming for the opportunity to give more money to their state government, nobody in Lansing has seen it. Rather, the surveys taken recently show people are willing to pay a little more for their booze and beer and that's it.

Until they do, nobody on the 2008 ballot representing anything close to a competitive legislative district is voting to raise taxes, at least not in the near term.

Instead, we're all going to get to know the "Cut" Family very well – K-12 Cut, Public Health Cut, Police Cut, University Cut, Fire Department Cut and Prison Cut, not to mention the extended family members.

We're not hopeless spectators here. Like everything else in life, we get what we pay for from our state government. If we want Michigan to be a showcase we can be proud of, with good roads, good schools, good communities, etc., it comes with a good price tag.

If we're content to watch the paint chip off our fiscal house, we can do that too. Or we may pay for it later with higher local property taxes or higher tuition.

If we don't want to approve our millages or any other tax increase, we can perpetuate the race to a low-tax rate, low-government state if we want. What the worst that can happen? Schools would shut down early because they can't pay their teachers. Our roads could look like Lake Lansing between Larch and Eastwood Towne Center. Our state could look to Mississippi or Alabama or any other state with a low tax rate and shabby backwater

reputation. We control our own pocketbooks. We control our politicians, too.

Which brings us back to the original question. Why should we care about our mess of a state budget?

Because it's our state. If we don't care about it, nobody else will.

(Kyle Melinn is the editor at the MIRS newsletter. His column runs weekly.)